triumph," if you'll forgive the paraphrase, "it only requires good men and women to do nothing", and for a long time that notion has haunted me with a sense of my own essential triviality. Acting and motherhood are hugely important to me, but wouldn't the world be more grateful if I'd put a bit of effort into curing cancer or securing world peace? But perhaps doing "something" is not just about grand gestures. Maybe it's enough to shut up and push. Those newspaper images shouldn't make the act of glittering seem flippant and pointless but essential. It refills the glass.

Which brings me back to Coventry. I've never understood the appeal of beating obscure records, which is why my first reaction on reading that story was to ask: "So what?" But whatever else ringing a bell for 17 hours may be — obsessive, amusing, unfathomable — it is absolutely not pointless. When you are bombarded with images of pointlessness — suffering, hatred, evil, pain — you realise how unpointless ordinary, routine life is. Bell-ringing is repetitive, absorbing enough to be a distraction, and mostly harmonic. And so is life, if you're lucky. As the plague of grimness sweeps over us, we must keep the bells ringing in our attics.

John Laughland The western media's view of Ukraine's election is hopelessly biased

The revolution televised

There was a time when the left was in favour of revolution, while the right stood unambiguously for the authority of the state. Not any more. This week both the anti-war Independent and the pro-war Telegraph excitedly announced a "revolution" in Ukraine. Across the pond, the rightwing Washington Times welcomed "the people versus the power".

Whether it is Albania in 1997, Serbia in 2000, Georgia last November or Ukraine now, our media regularly peddle the same fairy tale about how youthful demonstrators manage to bring down an authoritarian regime, simply by attending a rock concert in a central square. Two million anti-war demonstrators can stream though the streets of London and be politically ignored, but a few tens of thousands in central Kiev are proclaimed to be "the people", while the Ukrainian police, courts and governmental institutions are discounted as instruments of oppression.

The western imagination is now so gripped by its own mythology of popular revolution that we have become dangerously tolerant of blatant double standards in media reporting. Enormous rallies have been held in Kiev in support of the prime minister, Viktor Yanukovich, but they are not shown on our TV screens: if their existence is admitted, Yanukovich supporters are denigrated as having been "bussed in". The demonstrations in favour of Viktor Yushchenko have laser lights, plasma screens, sophisticated sound systems, rock concerts, tents to camp in and huge quantities of orange clothing; yet we happily dupe ourselves that they are spontaneous.

Or again, we are told that a 96% turnout in Donetsk, the home town of Viktor Yanukovich, is proof of electoral fraud. But apparently turnouts of over 80% in areas which support Viktor Yushchenko are not. Nor are actual scores for Yushchenko of well over 90% in three regions, which Yanukovich achieved only in two. And whereas Yanukovich's final official score was 54%, the western-backed president of Georgia, Mikhail Saakashvili, officially polled 96.24% of the vote in his country in January. The observers who now denounce the Ukrainian election welcomed that result in Georgia, saying that it "brought the country closer to meeting international standards".

The blindness extends even to the posters which the "pro-democracy" group, Pora, has plastered all over Ukraine, depicting a jackboot crushing a beetle, an allegory of what Pora wants to do to its opponents.

Such dehumanisation of enemies has well-known antecedents — not least in Nazi-occupied Ukraine itself, when pre-emptive war was waged against the Red Plague emanating from Moscow — yet these posters have passed without comment. Pora continues to be presented as an innocent band of students having fun in spite of the fact that — like its sister organisations in Serbia and Georgia, Otpor and Kmara — Pora is an organisation created and financed by Washington.

It gets worse. Plunging into the crowd of Yushchenko supporters in Independence Square after the first round of the election, I met two members of Una-Unso, a neo-Nazi party whose emblem is a swastika. They were unembarrassed about their allegiance, perhaps because last year Yushchenko and his allies stood up for the Socialist party newspaper, Silski Visti, after it ran an anti-semitic article claiming that Jews had invaded Ukraine alongside the Wehrmacht in 1941. On September 19 2004, Yushchenko's ally, Alexander Moroz, told JTA-Global Jewish News: "I have defended Silski Visti and will continue to do so. I personally think the argument ... citing 400,000 Jews in the SS is incorrect, but I am not in a position to know all the facts." Yushchenko,

> The poster for the 'pro-democracy' group depicts a jackboot crushing a beetle

Moroz and their oligarch ally Yulia Tymoshenko, meanwhile, cited a court order closing the paper as evidence of the government's desire to muzzle the media. In any other country, support for anti-semites would be shocking; in this case, our media do not even mention it.

Voters in Britain and the U have witnessed their governments lying brazenly about Iraq for over a year in the run up to war, and with impunity. This is an enormous dysfunction in our own so-called democratic system. Our tendency to paint political fantasies on to countries such as Ukraine which are tabula ras for us, and to present the wes as a fairy godmother swooping in to save the day, not only a way to salve a guil conscience about our own political shortcomings; it als blinds us to the reality of con tinued brazen western intervention in the democratic politics of other countries.

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